



Skills for Problem Solving

Upper Intermediate – Take Responsibility For Your Actions

A. Carlo is one of your friends at school. He's clever and fun, and he's good company. One day you see him stealing some sweets in a supermarket. You are shocked, but Carlo says it is OK because lots of kids shoplift. He also believes supermarkets make loads of money, so shoplifting from them doesn't matter. It isn't the same as stealing from a friend. He also says that it's the only way he can get things he wants because his parents don't give him pocket money.

Do you agree with your friend's behaviour? How can you help him?

B. Your friend Martha was the victim of cyberbullying on a social networking site. You were really sorry for her and helped her to overcome the problem by telling her parents and the school. Now, you find out that she has started to write bad things about a boy in your class on the same site. You ask Martha why she is doing this and she says that she thinks he was responsible for the cyberbullying she experienced in the past.

Do you agree with your friend's behaviour? How can you help her?

C. There is a boy in your class called Sam. He hates maths because he isn't very good at it. Every maths lesson he misbehaves so that he gets sent out of the class. He then stands outside the classroom window, messing around and trying to distract the students. The class starts 15 minutes late every lesson. Sam has not attended a whole maths lesson since the beginning of term.

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Reflection Point

Our behaviour sometimes has negative consequences for other people. If we can understand those consequences and stop blaming other people for our actions, we can make life better for them and for us.



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Aim: To help students become aware of how their actions affect others and to take responsibility for them.

Lead-in: Begin the lesson by playing a simple game of cause and effect. Write the following situations on the board and get the students to think of two possible effects of the action – one effect for the person doing the action and a second effect on the person or people on the receiving end (e.g., putting your shoes on the seat on a train or bus: 1) you feel comfortable, 2) you may bother the person sitting in front of you).

- *being aggressive in school*
- *stealing money*
- *revealing a friend's secret*
- *damaging public or someone else's property*
- *eating the wrong types of food*
- *always arriving late for appointments*

Discuss with students whether they have ever done any of the things listed on the board or know of anyone who might have done these things. (Point out that this is not a moment for blaming students; it's just for the purposes of discussion).

Get students to decide whether there could be any justification for the actions listed. Ask: *Why do you think students might do these things?* (Suggested answer: *because they don't think about the consequences*) Find out from students whether they think some of the actions are worse than others because of their consequences.

Ask them to put the situations in order of severity from 1 (worst) to 8 (least bad). Elicit from certain students why it is important to consider the negative consequences of our actions and encourage them to discuss their answers.

Choose A Scenario: Ask students to work in pairs and choose one of the three scenarios (A–C). Explain to students that they need to read the scenarios and answer the questions listed on the board about the person in their scenario. Write the following questions on the board:

- *Why does he/she do it?*
- *Who does he/she blame?*
- *In your opinion, who is responsible?*
- *Why should he/she stop doing it?*
- *How should/could he/she change for the better and stop doing it?*

Get students to work towards answering the questions and be ready to make suggestions for taking responsibility for the actions. Encourage students to refer to the Reflection Point.

Reflection Point: Point out to students that we all have 'rules' to follow in life. Make it clear that these might be as serious as laws or they might just be personal rules. Explain that rules are there to help people behave in the correct way and that breaking these rules almost always has consequences.

Make it clear to students that breaking rules is most serious when the consequences have an impact on other people's lives. However, explain that the consequences of not taking responsibility for our actions almost always has a negative impact on our own lives.

Class discussion: Put pairs together who chose the same scenario so that they can compare the answers to their questions. Find out from students whether they came up with similar answers.

Discuss the following questions with the students:

- *Do you think it is ever OK to 'break the rules'? Why (not)?*
- *How does knowing the consequences of your actions help you not to break the rules?*
- *Do you think simple rule breaking can lead to criminal activity? Why (not)?*

Work alone: Ask students to choose a second scenario and work individually. Tell them to follow the steps given in section 2.



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Go around the class monitoring students and providing help as needed. When students have finished, invite volunteers to stand up and say which scenario they chose and present their answers to the questions. Encourage the other students to listen to their classmates' opinions and judge whether or not the suggested advice students give is helpful and realistic.

Extension: Point out to students that it's always good to have a set of personal principles or a set of 'rules' that they try to follow in life. Write the following on the board:

Do to others as you want them to do to you.

Elicit the meaning that you should treat other people as you would like to be treated. Get students to compile a list of logical personal rules of behaviour and compare them to a partner's.

They should see how many of the items on their list are the same. Ask students to spend the week following their list as carefully as possible and see if they think it makes a difference to their lives and the lives of others.